Tutor-Facilitated Digital Literacy Acquisition: Helping Diverse Adult Learners Bridge the Digital Divide

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Funders

“Learner Web Partnership: A Multi-State Support System for Broadband Adoption by Vulnerable Adults”

“Tutor-Facilitated Digital Literacy Acquisition in Hard-to-Serve Populations: A Research Project”
Purpose

• To address primary barriers to broadband use in vulnerable & digitally excluded populations (BTOP)

• Better understand how individuals acquire digital literacy (IMLS)

• Target populations included:
  • Low-income adults
  • Unemployed adults
  • Adults without a high school education
  • Immigrants and non-native English speakers
  • Seniors
  • Incarcerated adults and ex-offenders
A Multi-State Support System for Broadband Adoption by Vulnerable Adults

- Approach to serving vulnerable populations:
  - Tutor-facilitated, community-based
  - Learning support system trains tutors and learners in public computer centers
  - Self-paced
- Content customized by partners: locally relevant and globally connected
• Web based learning platform
• Designed for adult learners
• Supports goal-directed & learner-driven content
• Shareable, customizable content
• Blended management of learning
• Structured & unstructured e-portfolio
• Roles for assistants (teachers, tutors, counselors, …)
• Links with other online and offline resources and systems
Learning Plans on Learner Web

Computer & Internet Skills

- Internet Skills: How do computers work?
- Internet Skills: How does the Internet work?
- Internet Skills: How can you find what you want online?
- Internet Skills: How do you use email?
- Internet Skills: What can you put online?
- Internet Skills: How can you stay safe online?
- Internet Skills: Who else can you meet online?
## Broadband Consumer Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learn about Broadband: What is it?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learn about Broadband: How can you be a savvy consumer?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn about Broadband: Do you need a computer?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn about Broadband: How do you prepare to buy broadband Internet?</td>
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Learning Plans on Learner Web

Introduction to Career Paths

Learn about Career Paths: Introduction
Learn about Career Paths: Career Awareness
Learn about Career Paths: Career Success
Learn about Career Paths: Career Exploration
Learning Plans on Learner Web

Tutor Training Plans

- 0.1 Introduction to Learner Web
- 0.2 Introduction to the BTOP Learner Web Project
- 1.0 Orientation to Tutoring in the BTOP Learner Web Project
- 2.1 Why Tutoring is Meaningful to You
- 2.2 Principles of Adults as Learners
- 2.3 Essential Tutoring Strategies and Supports
- 2.4 Reviewing Student Learning Plans
- Comprehensive Tutor Training Review
A National Network of Partnerships

- Portland State University: project lead & Learner Web host

- Implementation Partners
  - Richmond Public Library (Richmond CA)
  - Goodwill of Southeast Louisiana (New Orleans)
  - Minnesota Literacy Council (4 cities in MN)
  - Cayuga Community College (Literacy Zones and ABE programs across NY state)
  - Literacy Coalition of Central Texas (3 counties in Austin TX area)
  - South Texas College (2 counties in McAllen TX area)

- Content Development Partners
  - Learner Materials: Minnesota Literacy Council
  - Tutor Training Material: ProLiteracy
Local networks were made up of diverse coalitions of community anchor institutions:

- adult literacy programs
- adult basic education (ABE) and employment/training programs
- colleges and community colleges
- K-12 schools
- public libraries
- social services agencies
- public safety and public housing agencies
- faith-based organizations
Results of Our BTOP Project

Tutors

• Tutors logged nearly **50,000 hours** in computer labs
• **Over 41,000** of these hours were volunteered
• Over **500 tutors** were trained

Learners

• Over **12,000** eligible **learners** participated
• **8,375** eligible **learners** completed at least one Learning Plan
• **2,110** eligible **learners** completed all the plans they selected
• Eligible learners completed a total of over **37,000 Learning Plans**
IMLS: Tutor-Facilitated Digital Literacy Acquisition within Vulnerable Populations

- Research focused on the implementation of Portland State’s BTOP project (Sept. 30, 2010 - Sept. 30, 2013)

- Examines the digital literacy acquisition process

- Documents and describes tutor and learner interactions, learning environments, implementation variations, motivations, and impacts on learners

- Will make recommendations for implementation in organizations such as libraries, adult Ed programs, community based organizations, corrections, and other settings.
How We’re Researching Digital Literacy Acquisition

- **System Data**
  - Learners’ (background characteristics), initial digital literacy capabilities, goals, numerous “events” that occurred as they navigated learning plans

- **Lab Observations**
  - describe the learning conditions in the labs that were supportive of digital literacy acquisition
  - observe tutors as they engage with learners who have different learning needs
  - examine strategies tutors use to meet different learners unique needs

- **Interviews** with key stakeholders, tutors and learner
Interviews About Digital Literacy Acquisition

• **Interviews with tutors**
  • with a focus on **eliciting rich information about their experiences facilitating digital literacy acquisition**

• **Interviews with learners**
  • with a focus on their **motivations, challenges** and ways they overcame their fears.
  • focus on how they met **their goals**

• **Case Studies**
  • how learners **continue to acquire digital literacy beyond participation in the program** and the **impact** this acquisition had on **their lives**
Learner Interviews

- **Learners Were Purposively Selected**
  - ~ 10 learners from labs we visited in each of three regions (30 total learners)
  - Active in the two weeks before the interview
  - New to computers
    - started with the basic computer parts and mousing Learning Plans
  - Available to meet with the research team
  - Especially interested in learners who became tutors
Insights

• There were a variety of different implementations put into place in different contexts
  • Trio-tutoring, 1-to-1 matched pairs, every-tutor’s knowledgeable and can support learners’ work, bilingual tutors (Spanish), and others
  • Partner organizations supported and nurtured the implementations they designed - all yielded positive support for learners
Lessons Learned

• **Adaptable** and **locally situated frameworks** support digital literacy acquisition

• Personalization in **face-to-face tutoring** is essential for new-to-online learners

• **Flexible tools and approaches** support personalization
Insights

• With a **flexible blended model**, learners start at different places, and **are in control** of the paths they take.

• Digital literacy learning extends knowledge beyond just a single platform.
  • Those who are new to computers become flexible with new learning are motivated to explore how their new skills can be used in static locations and on mobile devices.
Lessons Learned

- A tool through which learners can select their priorities, and a model in which tutors extend and personalize instruction to build relevance and sustained motivation for learners.
Lessons Learned

- Learners articulate what digital literacy learning means:
  - Personal empowerment creates opportunities to connect, access, and locate information and networks that were previously inaccessible.
  - Learning digital literacy is like “being in an apartment with no windows and then getting windows installed for the first time.”
Final Thoughts

• With these tools, approaches and implementation ideas, the field can provide more learning opportunities for vulnerable populations